

Grannis, Florence.

RADIO READING FOR THE BLIND:
OPEN CHANNEL BROADCASTING.

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members of the NFB for all the positive things you are doing for the handicapped in America.

DR. ANDREW S. ADAMS,
Commissioner of
Rehabilitation Services.

Very sincerely,

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RADIO READING FOR THE BLIND: OPEN CHANNEL BROADCASTING

BY

FLORENCE GRANNIS

Editor's Note.—Mrs. Grannis is Assistant Director in charge of Library and Social Services, Iowa Commission for the Blind.

It is 7:00 a.m. Mr. Average Blind Guy is on his way to work at an average place of business. He is standing on a street corner waiting for his bus. Mr. Average Blind Guy shares this space with a number of Mr. Average Sighted Guys. Most of the Mr. Average Sighted Guys are reading the morning newspaper, so is Mr. Average Blind Guy. He has a small transistor am-fm radio connected to an ear plug inserted in his ear. Radio Reading for the Blind is being broadcast. Mr. Average Sighted Guy reads of the trouble between the Arabs and the Israelis — so does Mr. Average Blind Guy. Mr. Average Sighted Guy reads of interest rates dropping — so does Mr. Average Blind Guy. Mr. Average Sighted Guy reads of corruption in high places — so does Mr. Average Blind Guy. The bus comes. All these average people employed in average places of business get on and continue reading their papers. They all get to their desks or workbenches a little early and read a little longer. They are all engaged in an ordinary activity. The broadcast of the Radio Reading for the Blind on an open channel creates an "alternative technique" so Mr. Average Blind Guy can do what his sighted neighbors do — and do it as well.

While Mr. Average Blind Guy is ingesting Radio Reading for the Blind, many sighted people are too with this open channel set-up: the low income individuals (newspapers are no longer cheap—if your total monthly stipend is \$200 or less, you are going to hesitate to spend much of it on the daily newspaper—as the fellow says, "Progressively, I have more and more month left at the end of my money,"); the people who didn't master the art of reading well enough to cope with those big pages of print—and all of us librarians and other educators know only too well these non-readers are by no means uncommon; the frantically rushed citizens—get the family off to their activities—get ready for work—get a snatch of housework done—sit down and read the newspaper?—not likely; but Radio Reading for the Blind can be invited in by a turn of the dial, and at least some of its information will be heard; these people and many others listen—listen to the news and listen to the spots which tell the world, "The blind person is just like you"; and little by little attitudes change; these people are no longer uncomfortable in having a blind couple live in their apartment building; they know the blind secretary can work beside them in terms of equality; they know that blind machine operators can function effectively.

So how might the open channel Radio Reading for the Blind operate? Various in different communities, but here are two possibilities: A radio station operated by an educational institution might donate some time or sell it at nominal cost, or a regular station might give some "public service time." You get open channel broadcasting availability. Next clear with the local newspaper or newspapers so they may be read over the air. I've had people tell me that this just can't be done—the papers refuse to grant permission—they fear diminution of readership, competition, loss of sales. Okay, so you must be a good sales person as you approach the project. Now you have air time (hopefully this air time will be in the neighborhood of 6:00 - 8:00 a.m. and/or 4:00 - 7:00 p.m. all weekdays), and permission to read the newspaper. What's next?

Staffing. What should you look for? Someone who can read well, and who will relate favorably to volunteers. It is better not to have a dramatic actor type—in fact, no special training at all is needed—rather, competent reading, reliability, a personality the volunteers will want to see more of—and common sense. The readings should be "straight"—as much like a first class newscast as can be brought about—no "cutesy," "folksy," "chattsy" bits.

The volunteers who are recruited to read (and it is advisable to have one or two volunteer readers alternating with the paid person—both for the sake of variety of voice and because it is very tiring for one person to read one or two or more hours continuously) should be adequate in reading technique and pronunciation. If they are not, the paid person should help them see that their talents are best used elsewhere—without alienating them.

So, should all of the paper be read? If not—which parts? Omit the classified ads (they are tedious), omit the stock market quotations (they have their own time through regular commercial radio programming), omit the so called "hard news": "Alvin Johnson was killed on the corner of 42nd and Grand." The regular news programs—radio and t.v.—tell this until we are narcotized by it. Omit the comics—it takes too much time and talent to describe the pictures adequately. Read the editorials and the most favored columnists at key times. Read the non-dated most significant parts of the Sunday paper. Have special regular times for t.v. commentary; do the grocery ads at regular times.

The program should sparkle. There should be striking professional openings and closings (these can be taped). There probably should be *brief* musical interludes—avoid monotony but do not use much of your valuable air time for these interludes (not more than thirty seconds at a time). Appropriate spot announcements highlighting various aspects of services for the blind are good and will educate sighted and blind alike.

Should other materials besides the newspaper be broadcast? Yes, if time and audience interest allow—selected magazine articles (not otherwise likely to be available to blind people), perhaps some fine poetry, science fiction, material to appeal to children, pertinent interviews—especially with successful blind persons and leaders in work for the blind. (Incidentally, some of this material can be pretaped. If not, the paid radio reader may well have mighty long and hard days—besides delays and emergencies must be allowed for.)

Perhaps it can be assumed that Radio

Reading for the Blind is a good thing to have. What agency or individuals should undertake to produce it? Of course, since I am in charge of a library, and also of Radio Reading for the Blind, I feel that is the way to go and certainly these two entities do have an affinity—they both involve reading, supplying information; but truly the institution or person best able to cope—to be able to accomplish the goal of presenting the newspapers to the blind in the community—over the air waves—should be the one to do it. If this agency or individual has some glorious angel such as Hamm's Beer to help carry the financial load—all the better—but, and perhaps this is the most important aspect of all, Radio Reading for the Blind should not wag all the services for the blind. Let us remember that our primary goal is not just to have a radio program, but to have fuller lives for all blind persons, and to rehabilitate the blind who are in the employable years, (a much larger group, incidentally, than most people—including professionals in the field—believe). The ability to have easy knowledge of what is in the daily papers helps blind people be in the mainstream of life. It is a good in itself, but our greater good is still training in competitive employment and the total range of well balanced services.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Open Channel Broadcasting

Advantages

We have been fighting the good fight to enable blind people not to be segregated—in other contexts it has been demonstrated that there is no such thing as “separate but equal.”

Open channel broadcasting will almost

certainly be less costly than sub-channel.

Open channel broadcasting can further public education about blindness and its problems.

Open channel makes it possible to use commonly available and inexpensive, ordinary radios rather than special devices.


Open channel makes the spoken newspaper as portable as the printed one.

Disadvantages

It may well be that open channel will not be aired over nearly as broad an area as sub-channel.

This is a disadvantage that may be overcome fairly easily—or, in other words, if you are served these lemons it's not hard to make them into lemonade—establish other radio reading programs for the blind in key areas until you have the community you want to serve covered. True, you are going to have to ride herd on all of these, but in the scheme of things, this is not a big lump (or a significant lemon seed).

It is 4:30 p.m. The office and factory doors have opened and the workers are streaming out. Mr. Average Blind Guy already has his ear plug in position taking in the afternoon newspaper. A great cluster of Mr. Average Sighted Guys are buying papers at the corner vending machine. They—blind and sighted alike—will be waiting for the bus—reading as they wait. Some of the Mr. Average Sighted Guys catch on to what a handy way Mr. Average Blind Guy reads his paper and will emulate him, but Mr. Average Blind Guy isn't noticed much. He is just another guy—another



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human being with varying characteristics such as everyone has—living an average life in an average home, working at an average

place of business in the mainstream of existence.

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THE STRENGTH OF THE MOVEMENT: GOALS, PHILOSOPHY AND
EDGAR SAMMONS
BY
KENNETH JERNIGAN

Work with the blind, as we are so often and so painfully reminded by the agencies, is a "profession." It is characterized by counseling and conferences, planning and projects, standards and studies, guidance and goals. There are organizational charts and there is much talk about in service training, upward mobility, conceptual frameworks, and "staffing the case"—whatever that awesome term may mean.

Sometimes it almost seems as if the reason for it all (the individual, average, ordinary blind person) has been totally forgotten. Well, if not forgotten, then reduced to the role of specimen and statistic. There is hardly time for the blind person. He would interfere with the charts and casework and meetings and Federal requirements and long-range goals.

Among other things, this is why the National Federation of the Blind came into being, and why we continue to flourish as a movement. We are broadly based as a rank-and-file organization of blind people, and we must remain that way. We must never lose touch or break faith with the individual. Collective action; individual concern.

Our philosophy must, of course, be well thought out and clearly articulated; and it is. Our objectives must be sharply focused—and they are. We must march to our goals

with a sense of history and a dream of tomorrow—and we do. But, with all of this long-range strategy and broad perspective, we must never forget what it's all about.

It either translates into better lives for blind people—or forget it. We deal with wages and working conditions in the sheltered shops—and not just with overall patterns but with money in the pockets of individual workers and dignity in their lives as human beings. How is the blind person treated by his family, by his neighbors, and by the stranger on the street? How does the blind person see himself, and what does he think of his future? How does he perceive the Federation, and what does it mean in his life?

These are questions each of us must answer for himself. For my own part, I think the Federation has done more than any other single entity to improve the lives of the blind of this generation. And not just others—it has helped me, too: by changing public attitudes, by improving the climate of acceptance, and by giving me new perspectives. It has also given me many close personal friendships.

And always there are letters—a continuing stream of them from all over the country, reminders of what we are and what we must do. Edgar Sammons lives in the mountains of east Tennessee. I

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